



Muthusamy (second right) holds up a time capsule containing SIA literature to be opened in 25 years with Abidin on his left and Mohan (sixth left).

Huge potential for Sabah-India cooperation

Jonathan Nicholas

KOTA KINABALU: There exists tremendous possibility for collaboration and cooperation between India and Sabah, according to Indian High Commissioner B.N. Reddy.

He said India's progress and experience in the field of digital growth, financial technology, start-ups, renewable energy, green and sustainable development and skilling, among others, can be leveraged for cooperation between the two sides.

"These areas also happen to be the core thrusts of the Sabah under its Sabah Maju Jaya (SMJ) Development plan. There is huge potential for Indian companies to become partners in Sabah's growth and development in various sectors.

"India and Malaysia enjoy a robust trade relationship with bilateral trade at US\$19.4 billion in 2021 registering a growth of over 35 per cent and Indian investments in Malaysia are over US\$2.6 billion.

"Indian companies have been actively involved and have made significant contributions to Malaysia's economy and local job creation. There are over 135 Indian companies in the manufacturing sector who have created over 15,000 jobs so far," he said.

Reddy said this in his speech at the Sabah Indian Association's (SIA) 75th Anniversary celebrations held at the Sabah International Convention Centre on Sunday evening. SIA is the oldest Indian community association in Sabah.

It was his second official visit to Sabah as the High Commis-



The Indian dance troupes fill the evening with graceful movements of India's colourful culture.

sioner of India to Malaysia. He visited Sabah earlier this year in May, noting that it was a signal to further develop relations.

"Indian IT companies are becoming partners in the creation of digital infrastructure and digitalisation of Sabah's economy. India is a hub for innovation in exponential new-age technologies and potential collaborations could be explored.

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'Indian firms can play important role in Sabah's development'

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"Indian companies can play an important role in Sabah's infrastructure development projects, especially power transmission projects. For example, Indian companies like Tech-Mahindra are already working with the Sabah Government to develop digital solutions. More such collaborations can be forged.

"The potential for expansion is huge. There is lot of scope for increased trade linkages with Sabah in items such as rice, sugar, spices, vegetable and fruits. A lot of innovation and new models have been developed in India for treatment of waste water and supply of fresh water in rural areas. This could be another area for collaboration.

"Sharing of India's expertise in skilling personnel in various sectors is also a potential area. India's National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), who had also recently visited Malaysia, has trained 28 million have been trained so far and has over 10,000 training centres with a capacity to train 5 million per annum across various sectors," he said.

Reddy is also scheduled to pay a courtesy call to Sabah Governor Tun Juhar Mahiruddin and Chief Minister Datuk Seri Hajiji Haji Noor as well as Professor Datuk Dr Kasim Mansor, Vice Chancellor of University Malaysia Sabah (UMS).

The latest meeting will be to promote greater collaboration in education and research sector between universities in India and Sabah.

About 3,569 Indian students are studying in Malaysia, while an estimated 3,000 Malaysian students are studying in India,

mostly medicine.

Since 2007, 280 Malaysians have attended different courses offered by around 90 institutions under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme.

Under the Indian Scholarship and Trust Fund (ISTF), in the 2021-22 final year, 83 Malaysian-Indian students studying in various universities in Malaysia were awarded a total of RM307,500 in scholarships by the High Commission of India.

Meanwhile, Reddy said he is also scheduled to meet Sabah Tourism Board Chairman Datuk Joniston Bangkuai to discuss and explore opportunities for greater tourism flow between Sabah and India.

The night was graced with dances from an eight-member Special Cultural Dance Troupe from Punjab specialising in Bhangra who were sent exclusively by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR).

Similarly, the State Government of Tamil Nadu sent their official cultural dance troupe specialising in Bharatanatyam. They consisted of 12 senior artists.

"The High Commission of India is making efforts to promote greater culture and tourism collaboration between India and Sabah. The visit of the two Indian cultural dance troupes is in this direction," Reddy said.

Also in attendance representing the Chief Minister was State Assistant Minister Datuk Abidin Madingkir as well as SIA President Professor Datuk Dr P. Muthusamy and Organising Chairperson Datuk Dr. G. Mohan Gopal Naidoo.